

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 101

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

UNCLAS SINGAPORE 1787

GENEVA FOR PHELAN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRD, SN, US

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE PRESS COMMENT ON "DEVELOPING"

U. S. TEXTILE INDUSTRY

1. SINGAPORE'S BUSINESS DAILY NEWSPAPER EDITORIALIZED APRIL 20 ON PLIGHT OF U. S. TEXTILE INDUSTRY. EDITORIAL WAS REMARKABLY SYMPATHETIC, SAYING THAT OVERALL DEVELOPED STATUS OF U. S. ECONOMY DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT ALL SECTORS AND ALL WORKERS ARE EQUALLY AFFLUENT.

2. SEPARATE NEWS STORY (UNSOURCED) DESCRIBED CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS TO DEFLECT PRESSURE BY U. S. TEXTILE INDUSTRY AND UNIONS TO EXCLUDE THAT INDUSTRY FROM GENEVA MTN.

3. TEXT OF EDITORIAL FOLLOWS:

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"DEVELOPED CAN STILL MEAN DEVELOPING.

"THE WELL-DEFINED LINE DIVIDING DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON THE ONE HAND AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON THE OTHER IS SOMETIMES FACILE. THE TEXTILE INDUSTRIES OF COUNTRIES FORCED INTO THE CATEGORIES ON EITHER SIDE OF THE LINE IS A CASE IN POINT.

"IN THE US, THE LARGE NUMBERS OF WORKERS

EMPLOYED BY ITS TEXTILE INDUSTRY ARE NOT PART OF THE WELL-FED, AVERAGE AMERICAN FAMILIES THAT COME SO EASILY TO MIND. THEY COMPRISE LARGELY THE MINORITIES AND THE LATE IMMIGRANTS, MOSTLY WITH STANDARDS OF LIVING WHICH, ON A RELATIVE SCALE OF INCOMES AND EXPENDITURES, ARE COMPARABLE WITH THOSE OF THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN HONG KONG OR SINGAPORE.

"THE ARGUMENT THAT THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY, BEING A LABOR-INTENSIVE INDUSTRY, IS BEST SUITED TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES DOES NOT, THEREFORE, HOLD ABSOLUTELY. EVEN AMERICA NEEDS LABOR INTENSIVE INDUSTRIES TO ABSORB A LARGE SEGMENT OF ITS POPULATION WHICH, EVEN NOW, ARE NOT REALLY PART OF THE BRIGHT, WELL-POLISHED IMAGE OF DEVELOPED AMERICA.

"THE SAME ANACHRONISMS CAN BE FOUND IN FRANCE, THE UK, EVEN WEST GERMANY. A COUNTRY CANNOT EASILY PHASE OUT AN INDUSTRY ON WHICH ONE OF EVERY EIGHT OF ITS WORKERS, AS IN THE US, DEPENDS.

"PERHAPS A COUNTRY AS STRONG AS THE US CAN, THEORETICALLY, SUPPORT A MASSIVE RISE IN THE RANKS OF ITS UNEMPLOYED IN ORDER TO KEEP THE WHEELS OF INDUSTRY TURNING IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD. BUT THAT IS NOT, IN THE END, THE BEST ECONOMIC DECISION TO MAKE. POLITICALLY, IT WOULD BE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE.

"THE REALIZATION THAT, AS FAR AS THE TEXTILE
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WORLD IS CONCERNED, THERE ARE "DEVELOPING" SECTORS NEARLY EVERYWHERE TAKES SOME OF THE MORAL STING OUT OF THE CRY FOR LESS PROTECTIONISM. BUT IT SERVES TO UNDERSCORE JUST HOW COMPLEX THIS WORLD IS."

4. EMBASSY COMMENT: NO DOUBT THE CONCLUSION OF US-SINGAPORE BILATERAL TEXTILE AGREEMENT HAS INFLUENCED SINGAPORE TO LOOK A BIT MORE UNDERSTANDINGLY ON PROBLEMS OF US TEXTILE INDUSTRY. ICA RECENTLY DISTRIBUTED NEWS STORY BY ONE OF ITS STAFF WRITERS DESCRIBING PROBLEMS IN THE US INDUSTRY AND THIS MAY ALSO HAVE INFLUENCED PAPER'S EDITOR. WHILE THIS EDITORIAL IS MOST EMPHATICALLY NOT A HARBINGER OF A MORE RELAXED GOS ATTITUDE TOWARD PROTECTIONISM IN GENERAL, IT DOES SERVE TO UNDERSCORE PRAGMATIC WORLD VIEW OF SINGAPOREAN LEADERS.
HOLDRIDGE

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